

JULIAN WACHNER COMPOSITION

**“... an imaginative flair for allusive text setting...
...silken complexities...close harmonies...”**

(The New York Times)

**“Deftly orchestrated...winning touches for
percussion...impassioned work... shades of
minimalism...a compendium of surprises”**

(The Washington Post)

**“...jazzy, energetic, and ingenious... grinding dissonances,
but also much melody, glisteningly orchestrated...”**

(The Boston Globe)

**“...at turns stentorian and lyrical, but always direct, and
splendidly wrought...”**

(The Montreal Gazette)

**“Wachner is both an unapologetic modernist and an
open-minded eclectic—his music has something to
say.”** *(American Record Guide)*

**“...a sonic tour de force...one feels bathed in love...a
stunning climax.”**

(The American Organist)

**“...splendour, dignity, outstanding tone combinations,
sophisticated chromatic exploration...wavering between
a glimmer and a tingle.”** *(La Scena Musicale)*

**“...Full of rich harmonies, sinful dissonances, sprinkled
with exciting percussion...
a fresh, new compositional style...”** *(The Washington Examiner)*

JULIAN WACHNER COMPOSITION PRESS EXCERPTS

OPERA

REV23 (2017) “Rev. 23: *A Farcical, Hellish Opera* is a compendium of arts references bursting with innuendo and cheeky wit...**Magnificent beast of a score!**” – *New England Theatre Geek*

“...highlighted by Wachner’s inventive score...Wachner’s **endlessly creative score moved with integrity and versatility among styles**, not only rock, jazz, and bluesy settings, but affecting chamber music....The opera played as one continuous act, almost two hours long.” - *Classical Voice*

“Wachner’s REV. 23 sounds as broad, interesting, and brightly colored as the characters and plot of Jacobs’ libretto. Wachner is able to maintain cohesion with this rhythmic discipline, while sampling and playing with all manner of color and genre. To be sure, much of the opera’s affable 12-tone language is also informed by the expectations and conventions of musical theater. Wachner’s excursions to different genres keep REV. 23 exciting and fun: an early-Romantic ballet accompanies the dancers that appear in the second act; a Handelian movement accompanies the Archangel Michael’s first appearance on stage. Scattered among musical numbers that could have been lifted straight out of *Sweeney Todd* or *Rent* are arias and ensemble pieces that Alban Berg or Benjamin Britten would have been proud to have written. **Amidst this entertaining gallimaufry, Wachner often reveals deep emotional intelligence:** Persephone’s mournful second-act aria was a highlight of the evening; Eve’s “I don’t know what’s beyond Paradise” in the final act provided a sobering conclusion to the breathless absurdity that is REV. 23.” – *The Boston Musical Intelligencer*

“Sunday’s audience rose to its feet...**Wachner’s protean score deftly employs a grab-bag of 20th-century operatic and musical-theater styles to hold a mirror to the libretto.**” – *The Boston Globe*

“Wachner focused on writing music that held together via a tactus, otherwise known more colloquially as an internal pulse, letting the style vary from there. What happens as a result is that serial pointillism gets juxtaposed against musical theater in the vein of Leonard Bernstein or Stephen Sondheim, bel canto arias get juxtaposed against swing, and the style varies wildly. Due to using the inner pulse, though, Wachner ensured that all of the material does not feel disconnected from what comes before it and after it, creating **an endlessly unfolding chain of highly controlled polystylism**. Sometimes, styles nested within one another: an aggressive but static accompaniment reminiscent of John Adams and *Nixon in China* smashed in a pointillistic tone row above it, an actual moment from the beginning of the first act (I inadvertently got a work-in-progress copy of the REV. 23 score from the Beth Morrison Projects workshop at New England Conservatory, verified by Wachner, so that statement came from theoretical analysis). Having an extensive knowledge in the comic opera literature himself, Wachner also used Falstaff, Gianni Schicchi, Albert Herring, and Christopher Sly as models for writing comic operas, and this **research shows in how the music can be bipolar in character to highlight the needed emotion**. The music at times became referential too, heightening the polystylism and taking direct references from Wagner (the Tristan chord) and Handel (the Baroque-sounding consort under the introduction of Archangel Michael), among a multitude of others. Hearing such references is fairly novel and entertaining, showing the production is very aware of its lineage.” – *The Boston Musical Intelligencer, second review*

EVANGELINE REVISITED – Opera in 2 Acts (In French) (2005)

“**Wachner’s music packs a punch**, too. There is quite a bit of folk or folk-influenced material;

there are cabaret episodes and lots of dance music; Verdi, Stravinsky, Britten, and others are evoked. There are grinding dissonances, but also much melody, **glisteningly orchestrated, and with prominent solos for many instrumentalists who become storytellers, too.**” – *The Boston Globe*

“It is safe to say that **the music of Julian Wachner was responsible for most of the applause** that greeted the world premiere...**Wachner's music was at turns stentorian and lyrical, but always direct, and splendidly wrought whether for solo voice, chorus or orchestra.** The many stylistic excursions (folk fiddling, jazz, cabaret) seemed to emanate from an expressive French core... he was also a good conductor ...the McGill Contemporary Ensemble was superb in the pit.” – *The Montreal Gazette*

ORCHESTRA

GAUDE, AN L.B. ANNIVERSARY FOR ORCHESTRA (2017) “Wachner’s piece reflects its title in its ample brass and percussion scoring, although he gives the big string section plenty to do. **Bright chorale-like chords contrast with more exuberant string figures,** and Wachner did not neglect to inject melody into his score— an important aspect of ‘joyous’ music. Wachner exuded joy himself when taking his curtain call, and **the large audience rang with appreciation.**” – *Boulder Daily Camera*

TRIPTYCH FOR ORGAN & LARGE ORCHESTRA (2012) “‘Logos’ is a **sonic tour de force,** making full use of colors, dynamics, and rhythmic energy characteristic of organ and orchestra. ‘Agape,’ which opens with an organ solo in which one feels **bathed in love,** is a welcome contrast to the surrounding movements. The concluding section, “Angelus,” **demanding the utmost from all the players,** is filled with complex rhythms and textures and brings the extended work to a **stunning climax.**” – *The American Organist*

LIFTING THE CURSE – Orchestra & Narrator [Works for Young Audiences] (2006) “**Wachner puts the theme through some ingenious paces,** surveying many musical moods and forms to match Littlefield’s text. In its first appearance, the theme is as majestic as the overture to Wagner’s ‘Die Meistersinger.’ Later there is a playful variation on woodblocks; when the Curse is mentioned, there is a solemn chorale in the brass.” – *The Boston Globe*

THE MIDNIGHT RIDE OF PAUL REVERE – Orchestra and Narrator (2004)

“Also on the program was a previous commission that combines music and narration far more cogently. Wachner sets up an ostinato-driven vocabulary that lets the orchestra fall into intricate, repeated vamps while text is spoken, so the musical thread remains unbroken. **He also isn’t afraid to let a solo line sustain the poem’s atmosphere on the strength of instrumental color.**” – *The Boston Globe*

CONCERTO FOR CLARINET AND ORCHESTRA (2002)

“[In] Wachner's own Clarinet Concerto, the first movement begins with a pulse that generates cloudlike bursts of color and begins to push them around, like parts of a mobile; the other two movements are **jazzy, energetic, and ingenious.** Andrews offered big-time chops and wonderful subtlety of tonal coloration.” – *The Boston Globe*

CHORAL-ORCHESTRAL

COME, MY DARK-EYED ONE (2009/11) “...the Back Bay Chorale chose **an acknowledged masterpiece**, Brahms' German Requiem, and commissioned **what one can imagine might turn out to be another**, Julian Wachner's Come My Dark Eyed One...Wachner excelled at word setting. The work developed in intensity beginning with his Randall Thompson-esque strains of crowd-pleasing choral writing to his own almost savage response to Emily Dickinson's ‘Wild Night.’” – *The Boston Musical Intelligencer*

“Wachner’s own piece, an **ambitious secular oratorio** of sorts charting love and loss, including texts by Emily Dickinson and Sara Teasdale. **Deftly orchestrated**, with winning touches for percussion, Wachner’s **impassioned work** presents a mash-up of 20th-century styles – from Mahler-like muscularity and jazzy Bernstein to Britten’s chromaticism and shades of minimalism...the a cappella movement ‘Shall we, too, rise,’ [is] music fine enough to stand on its own.” – *The Washington Post*

SYMPHONY NO. I (2001)

“In five movements the symphony opens with an extensive, all-orchestral section, ‘Incantations.’ Identical, hushed choral movements, ‘Prayer’ and ‘Remembrance’ then frame a central third movement, ‘Exile.’ The work concludes with a choral-orchestral ‘Reconciliation.’ Clearly, one of the musical inspirations behind the symphony was Stravinsky’s Symphony of Psalms, but Wachner’s work is far less cool and austere. **It is powerfully, even violently, rhythmic over many pages....**The Incantations movement for orchestra strives to cast spells with its mysterious, often static quality, and its hypnotic mottos for timpani, its oriental colors, its suggestion of **a wild sacrificial dance**. The ‘Exile’ section is almost brutal in its depiction of God’s wrath. The Prayer and Remembrance movements offer some balm, albeit couched in odd, unstable harmonies.” – *The Boston Globe*

LAMENTATIONS for Chorus and Orchestra (1997)

“...showed Belshazzar’s Feast squaring off against ‘Symphony of Psalms,’ and proved **a veritable bonanza of orchestrational, dramatic, choral invention, little of it predictable.**” – *The Boston Globe*

CHORAL

RILKE SONGS (2001)

“Julian Wachner, (b. 1969) has taken six of Rilke's poems, set them for SATB chorus with divisi and given birth to a musical product that is well worth noting. **Wachner's settings are text driven and completely immersed in the descriptive color of the native tongue in which the Rilke poems are set.** Thick and dense textures give way to unison and simple four-part homophony. Wide tessituri are explored but not exploited. Bi-tonality permeates much of his writing style. Although his writing can seem dissonant, it is imbued with a soft sense of tonal color that embraces Rilke's fascination with the flow of the movement of animals and more important, the deeper meanings of the text. **Performed in its entirety, or two or three as a set, they are an outstanding contribution to choral literature.**” – *Choral Journal Vol. 44 Nr. 9*

“Mr. Wachner’s ‘Rilke Songs,’ six settings of poems about animals real and legendary, showed an

imaginative flair for allusive text setting, evoking a caged panther's restless stalking and contrasting a swan's clumsy gait on land with its elegance in water. The chorus handled the **silken complexities of Mr. Wachner's close harmonies** gracefully." – *The New York Times*

"... the light and transparent 'Flamingos' and angular 'Black Cat,' which starts interestingly with low male voices, are impressive." – *The Washington Post*

"Highly descriptive, the six poems of Rainer Rilke deal with birds and animals, Wachner treating them with an almost reverential atmosphere, though he does introduce clashing harmonies to highlight a point." – *David Denton [Blog]*

SOMETIMES I FEEL ALIVE (1998)

"Sometimes I Feel Alive (1998), to texts by e.e. cummings, explores aspects of love from the sensual to the selfless **through an appealing blend of jazzy pop-music rhythms, canonic writing** (at which Wachner excels), and hymnlike choral blending with a near-Ivesian sound." – *The Washington Post*

AT THE LIGHTING OF THE LAMPS for choir, organ and flute (1998)

"The sheer sense of a peace at the conclusion of At the Lighting of the Lamps is one of the most magical moments I have experienced in a contemporary choral work.

The factor throughout this disc is Wachner's belief and sincerity in his creativity... I strongly recommend this disc to you." – *Deseret News*

MISSA BREVIS (1987)

"The longest religious work is the earliest piece here: Missa Brevis dates to 1987, when Wachner was 18. The irregular, Orff-like rhythms of the 'Gloria' are especially attractive, and there are some intriguing elements to the setting: 'Kyrie eleison' is quite consonant, 'Christe eleison' more dissonant.
– *The Washington Post*

CHAMBER

CONCERNING PASSION for contralto and piano (1998)

"[the work] enjoyed the benefit of a frank and spacey text as well as the composer's ability to create a real character, tonally vary the different sections, and **give the singer something challenging and satisfying to tear into.**" – *The Boston Globe*

CYCLES for clarinet and piano (1998)

"...began in claustrophobia, angst, and a sort of sullen lyricism, then **jumped and shrilled its way to a conclusion.** Characters were created here..." – *The Boston Globe*

RECORDINGS

JULIAN WACHNER, SYMPHONY NO. 1, WORKS FOR ORCHESTRA AND VOICES

Naxos/Musica Omnia (2014)

“Since Wachner’s work is weighted heavily toward sacred music, ‘Come, My Dark-Eyed One’ stands somewhat apart...**the series of moods that unfold is astonishingly clear, from yearning to playfulness to painful solitude.** The third movement is an unmistakably erotic scene built around Sara Teasdale’s ‘Joy’ and Emily Dickinson’s ‘Wild Nights!’” – *The Boston Globe*

“...it is hard to resist the spell of Wachner’s **high-energy rhetoric**, particularly when he is working with large numbers of resources...” – *Classical Music Examiner*

“[Wachner’s] comprehension of massive orchestration shine[s] through in a **vast spectrum of sound.** Wachner’s work, though based in the current ideas of mixing styles, tonality and rhythmic structures, is **very much a style all his own.**” – *Edge*

“Wachner has a **pronounced rhythmic sensibility** and puts it to good use in movements that have shifting meters and a dynamic thrust to them. At some point you occasionally detect a Bernstein influence (the Mass sometimes comes to mind as a precursor), other times some of the voicings and counterpoints of later Reich also seem to be launching points, still other moments there is a jazziness to it all. But then there are the **tender and mysterius aspects**, too. **None of it sounds derivative.** It does seem an integral part of a developed grand tradition of sacred music, with Wachner taking his place in a potential pantheon” – *GappleGate Classical-Modern Music Review*

“The other large work in the collection, ‘Come, My Dark-Eyed One’ was commissioned for a concert with the Brahms Requiem. For contrast, Wachner chose a secular subject, the loss of a loved one and the emotions it triggers. I found the work quite compelling as the protagonist works his way through to acceptance. To my ears, it sounded like a companion piece to Corigliano’s ‘Ghosts of Versailles’” — and one that seems to be **more successful in its evocation of atmosphere and drama.** – *WTJU*

JULIAN WACHNER, Triptych for Organ and Large Orchestra,

Concerto for Clarinet

Atma Classique 2012

“Sparked by multiple talents of composer-conductor Julian Wachner, this disc succeeds on all fronts! Out of orchestral chaos the organ enters with **chordal grandeur** in the introductory ‘Logos.’ An introspective two-part organ passage plus its **aggressive string response** become the bases for the following allegro...Bélanger and selected instrumentalists are beautifully reflective again in the middle movement ‘Agape,’ the **violins serene and inspired in the closing melody.** The organist shines in the final “Angelus,” building steadily with the orchestra through tricky metre changes to **a great, moving conclusion.** Himself a virtuoso organist, Wachner has created **long sonorities**, repeated chords, and busy passages that are static harmonically to suit the highly reverberant space. **Highly recommended.**” – *The Whole Note*

“It’s difficult not to think of Messiaen when listening to *Triptych* for organ and full orchestra by Wachner

(who conducts excellently here, by the way): **splendour, dignity, outstanding tone combinations, sophisticated chromatic exploration, albeit polarized—but also a certain personal “je ne sais quoi”.** Among its other qualities there is a rich backdrop, **wavering between a glimmer and a tingle.**” – *La Scena Musicale*

“The Triptych, performed here by French-Canadian keyboardist Philippe Bélanger and the Orchestre Métropolitain of Montréal, is a three-movement, 40-minute tour-de-force of **imposing power, virtuosic toccatas, quiet meditation, and joyful celebration.** **Wachner is both an unapologetic modernist and an open-minded eclectic...his music has something to say.**” – *American Record Guide*

“On a lighter plane, Wachner’s **eclectic Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra** receives loving treatment from St. Louis Symphony principal clarinetist Scott Andrews and the McGill Chamber Orchestra. Andrews’ clarinet manages to be **Coplandesque, jazzy, klezmerish and more** in the expressive introduction and motoric allegro.” – *The Whole Note*

“In contrast, the Clarinet Concerto, courtesy of Saint Louis Symphony Principal Clarinet Scott Andrews and the McGill Chamber Orchestra of Montréal, is a single-movement, 13-minute piece in two sections - the first mysterious contemplation, the second a lively dance with hints of jazz. **Wachner is both an unapologetic modernist and an open-minded eclectic...his music has something to say.**” – *American Record Guide*

JULIAN WACHNER: COMPLETE CHORAL MUSIC, VOLUME I. **NAXOS. RELEASED MARCH 2010**

“In his own choral music, Washington Chorus Music Director [Julian Wachner](#) draws on so many influences that his successes are **a compendium of surprises**, and even his less-successful works have engaging moments. Yet on the basis of this first volume of a planned Naxos series of all Wachner’s choral music, the simplest-sounding pieces can touch a listener most strongly. **Wachner considers his own style eclectic, but on this CD it seems more combinatorial: A little of this, a little of that, adding up at its best to something new and very personal.**”

– *The Washington Post*

“Not quite a household name, American composer/conductor Julian Wachner is now in his early 40s and has built himself a stylistic reputation for eclecticism. This recording by the Elora Festival Singers is an example of **just how broad Wachner’s stylistic embrace can be.** It is also another example of the artistically tenacious style that has become the hallmark of the EFS. Because we most often associate a composer with an identifiable vocabulary or language, it’s a bit odd to find someone so stylistically diverse yet so secure in his writing. Wachner’s command of choral techniques and effects is solid and polished. The EFS’s ability to meet the exacting demands of this music makes this recording altogether remarkable. Wachner describes his choral writing as ‘text-driven.’ How important and effective this is becomes evident as one plays through the 19 tracks of sacred and secular works. Poetic texts by E.E. Cummings and Rilke **deliver fanciful, sensitive and experimental moments always linked to a detectably romantic undercurrent.** Wachner’s sacred music, by contrast, may appeal more to the structured expectations of its audience but is no less inventive than his art song. Perhaps the most colourful work on this recording is his *Missa Brevis*. Each of its four sections is clearly cast in a unique form with considerable variation in ensemble colour and tempo. Most importantly, Wachner never loses touch with the ‘other-worldliness’ that needs to be at the heart of all sacred music. Naxos has produced a fine recording with the EFS, which bodes well for their projected “complete choral music” series. ATMA plans a release in the fall of more Wachner music – for organ and orchestra.” – *The Whole Note*

“I can now add the name of Julian Wachner to my list of composers in the United States who have returned to traditional values. Born in Hollywood in 1969, he has become one of the nations most valued musicians offering a wide spectrum of music. In his erudite programme note he speaks of his desire to tread a personal path, though I do find it also being taken by a new generation on both sides of the Atlantic. It is mainly tonal; will fall easily on the ear of the most conservative traditionalist, and offers rich rewards to performers. **There is abundant lyricism; elements of minimalism; plenty of interestingly tricky rhythms, and athletic choral writing.** Certainly his early career in the church is evident in both sacred and secular scores that have similar stylistic characteristics. It reminded me of much we hear today from young English composers, or maybe the style evolved in the opposite direction.” – David Denton (BLOG)

“Choral music in the contemporary classical mode perhaps has not gotten its due. There are a few composers who have excelled at it, but it is not a genre as central to our age as, for example, the instrumental chamber ensemble. However based on volume one of the *Complete Choral Music* (Naxos) by Julian Wachner (b. 1969), **there is excellent work being done today.** The Elora Festival Singers under Noel Edison sing like angels; they do complete justice to Wachner's music. It has a touch of the aural voicings of Paert and Reich, but not in terms of style. Wachner uses the tang of modern harmonies as sound color. His music is declamatory or quiescent, depending on mood, and there is a minimalist touch here and there. **Mostly, though, it is Wachner's extension of choral tradition via his own contemporary vision that strikes this listener.** The nine works presented on this volume one have depth and integrity. Here's a composer who feels completely at home with an *a cappella* choir, or voices with organ accompaniment. **It is a very refreshing listen.** The music has moments of true beauty. Bring on the next volume!” – Gapplegate Music Reviews

ARSIS CD – Sacred Music (2001)

“The accompanying booklet carries a quotation from the Boston Globe that describes the compositions of Julian Wachner as ‘unabashed emotionalism and showy orchestration.’ I am not quite sure which way I would take that if I were Wachner, but it certainly sums up the present disc in a nutshell. He is an extremely gifted young man, equally at home as a choral trainer, orchestral conductor, concert organist, and lecturer, Lukas Foss identifying him as ‘a talent that will invigorate the musical world.’ **The present disc would portray Wachner as a composer who is pinning his hope that melody will eventually triumph over atonality...** Though Wachner may be the first to reject the notion, he is writing music that would be ideal for the great cathedral choirs in the UK. You can just imagine the British boy sopranos hitting those high notes in the *Three Songs of Isaiah*, which causes some stress for the Boston sopranos. The choir, which Wachner founded in 1995, is a very well-balanced ensemble that produces a tone of considerable beauty, a feature we can enjoy in the more introspective qualities of one of his most recent scores, *At the Lighting of the Lamps*. **The sheer sense of a peace at the conclusion is one of the most magical moments I have experienced in a contemporary choral work. The factor throughout the disc is Wachner's belief and sincerity in his creativity. If that does include a ‘showy’ quality at times, the ends justify the means,** to the extent that these works should find a place in the church choral repertoire.” – *The Deseret News*